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TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE
FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SUMMARY NOTES OF 546th NSC MEETING
February 7, 1965; 8:00 to 9:45 A.M.

Reprisal Strikes in North Vietnam

There was a discussion of the statement to be issued from the White House announcing the reprisal air strikes in North Vietnam.

J1 [Senator Mansfield: Why cannot we handle this matter through the United Nations? Can't the Geneva powers act?]

J2 [The President: This cannot be done.]

Secretary McNamara: The surprise attack on our base at Pleiku resulted in 7 U.S. deaths and 109 wounded. Numerous U.S. planes were damaged.

In reprisal, four army barracks in North Vietnam were attacked. Three of the four targets were weathered in. Either the attack planes did not take off or they went to the target but could not see enough to drop their bombs. A total of 33 attack aircraft were involved, plus 8 planes providing aircap and 8 planes engaged in flak suppression.

J3 As to our next move, [Ambassador Taylor recommends we attack the three targets not hit because of weather. Notwithstanding his recommendation, no U.S. planes should take part in a second attack.] A South Vietnamese attack on their target is acceptable. We would provide an aircap of 4 to 8 planes plus 4 to 8 flak suppression planes to assist the South Vietnamese.

Under Secretary Ball: The reprisal by the South Vietnamese would be for the Viet Cong attack on a South Vietnam village. This is a different situation from the strikes authorized yesterday. We need to avoid appearing to respond only when Americans are attacked.

J4 [Secretary McNamara is right in recommending that we should not hit today the three targets not hit yesterday. If we do so, the Communists will get a wrong signal and think that we are launching an offensive.] Our officials in Saigon want a graduated response to the entire North Vietnamese military effort [rather than merely retaliatory strikes to attacks by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.]

General Wheeler: The Chiefs believe that ground action against the North Vietnamese effort is adequate to reverse the situation. Air strikes on the three targets are not necessary from a military point of view. However, a South Vietnamese attack on their target is acceptable.

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By DCAS NARS, Date 8-13-82

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

15 [Ambassador Thompson: We have completed our reprisal action for the North Vietnamese surprise attack. Another attack cannot be called reprisal. The punishment should fit the crime. No additional air strikes should be made now.]

(The statement to be issued by the White House was approved and given to George Reedy for release to the press.)

Secretary Dillon: If we encourage an air strike by the South Vietnamese, everyone will think it is a U.S. attack. Therefore, we should send along U.S. planes to ensure that the South Vietnamese strike is successful.

16 [Representative Ford: Why should we only hit one out of four targets? If the plan to strike four was good, why should we not complete it?]

17 [Several Council members explained the nature of the decision to make a reprisal strike only.]

18 The President: We need to know the extent of the damage caused by yesterday's strike. This will have a bearing on future decisions. [We should give consideration to Taylor's recommendation but for the time being, we should approve a strike by the South Vietnamese only.] Bomb damage assessment flights by U.S. planes should be flown.

Secretary McNamara, turning to the question of withdrawing dependents, circulated a text of a White House release covering the subject. It would announce the immediate withdrawal of dependents or their withdrawal in a two-week period, as Ambassador Taylor prefers.

The President: For 15 months we have been trying to bring about the withdrawal of dependents. Thus, a decision to do so within 15 days is acceptable. The number of days in which they will be withdrawn can be worked out so long as it is absolutely certain that the dependents are coming out.

Secretary McNamara: The Hawk Battalion will go ashore at Danang today. Some planes which were diverted and went on to Saigon can be used for withdrawing dependents. As many as 400 or 500 can be removed on these planes.

The President: Do we think that Saigon is going to be a target? If so, why should we make any announcement about the withdrawal of dependents? We should hold the announcement until we have talked to Ambassador Taylor by phone. The word "orderly" should be taken out of the announcement.

The announcement as finally released is attached.

Also attached is the transcript of the Press Secretary's briefing at 10:00 A.M. February 7.

Bromley Smith